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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004240

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/15/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: REFERENDUM UPDATE 2 - FREE AND FAIR AND LOTS OF  
SUNNI ARABS VOTING

Classified By: POLCOUNS ROBERT S. FORD FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)  
AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY. All reporting indicates that the October 15 referendum was generally free and fair. There were some allegations of irregularities at sites around the country, especially in Ninewa. There were isolated incidents of violence but these did not much affect the voting. Although there were more polling stations than in the January elections, overall voter turnout was lighter than expected -- particularly in the South. Voter turnout in strife-ridden Anbar province was relatively low compared to other provinces, but far above the turnout in January. Notably, the election commission operated 144 polling centers there compared to roughly 30 in January. Likewise, in Ninewah, where only 17 percent of voters turned out in January, this time voter turnout appears to have reached the 65 percent plus range. According to election officials, preliminary results are expected in the next two days, with final results likely in five to seven days. END SUMMARY.

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REFERENDUM APPEARS TO BE FREE AND FAIR -- BUT SOME PROBLEMS  
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12. (U) As polls close on the historic vote for Iraq's draft constitution, all reporting indicates that, overall, it was a free and fair process. While there were some allegations of irregularities, particularly in Ninewa Province, voters, observers, and government officials generally reported that the majority of polling stations opened, ballots and ballot boxes were available, and there were far fewer incidents of violence than expected.

13. (C) The reported incidents of violence included: several voters assassinated in Baghdad's Ghazaliyah neighborhood; a bomb in Baquba; and a hostage incident in Ramadi. Security for the elections was effective and voters had unimpeded access to polling stations. There were more polling stations than in the January elections, especially in Ninewa and Anbar. Citizens appeared to have been generally free to vote without fear of intimidation. The Iraqi Electoral Information Network (an NGO group supported with training from the National Democratic Institute) reported that women played a large role in the voting. During Embassy and REO/SET site visits around the country, women appeared to represent the majority of voters except in Fallujah.

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SUNNIS AND KURDS -- GOOD SHOWING; SHI'A TURNOUT LIGHTER?  
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14. (C) Preliminary reports suggest that voter turnout, while very good, was smaller than in the January elections, especially in the South. Estimates have ranged from 33 percent in some of the Shi'a provinces to 66 percent in provinces such as Kurdish Sulamaniya. Initial estimates for turnout in Ninewah suggested turnout of 65 percent or more, according to the Independent Election Commission of Iraq (IECI). Ninewah, expected to be one of the key provinces in the referendum, saw some problems related with polling centers opening, voter intimidation, and vote fraud. Irregularities included allegations of Peshmerga troops voting in the area, Kurds being bussed into the region to vote, and Peshmerga intimidation of Sunni voters. In what we judge to be the other key province, Salah ad-Din, voter turnout also appeared to be heavy - over 65 percent, according to IECI. Our initial take is that these problems are much less than they were in January, but our information is not complete. Polling sites in Kirkuk, where the constitution is expected to pass, were reportedly orderly. However, there was much voter discontent over the last minute amendments to the draft constitution, according to PolFSN there.

15. (C) Voter turnout in the Khalis District of Diyala was reportedly so high that officials opened two new polling stations. There were contradictory reports regarding the number of open polling centers in Al Anbar Province, but voting in Fallujah, where the result is likely to be an overwhelming "no," appeared to be heavy (initial estimates suggest the number could top 100,000, according to our

Poloff there). However, voter turnout in Ramadi and western Anbar was reportedly light (initial estimates near 10,000, according to Ramadi Poloff).

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NEXT STEPS  
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16. (C) Polls close at 1700 local (all voters in line at 1700 will be allowed to cast their votes). The overall consensus of observers is that referendum day went exceedingly well. However, how the process continues to play out in the tallying phase will be an indicator of how free and fair the referendum really was. IECI indicates that preliminary results are expected within the next two days, with final tallies expected in five to seven days. Polling stations will conduct in situ counts and tabulations of the ballots, after which the voting materials will be sealed, collected, and eventually transported to the IECI Tally Center in Baghdad. Khalilzad